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THE
DOMINION OF PROVIDENCE
OVER THE
PASSIONS OF MEN.

A
SERMON,

PREACHED AT
PRINCETON, May 17, 1775,

BEING THE
GENERAL FAST
Appointed by the CONGRESS through the
UNITED COLONIES.

By JOHN WITHERSPOON, D.D.
President of the College of New JERSEY.

PHILADELPHIA printed ;
LONDON reprinted,
For FIELDING and WALKER, No. 20, Pater-noster-Row.
M,DCC,LXXVIII.

THE
DOMINION OF THE CHILDREN

OVER THE

PASSION OF THE

SERMON

PRINCETON, MAY 15, 1875

BEING THE

GENERAL EAST

Addressed by the CONGRESS through the

UNITED COLONIES.

By JOHN WITHERSPOON, D.D.

President of the College of New Jersey

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MDCCCXXV.

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following sermon, first printed at *Philadelphia*, was, some time since, reprinted in *Scotland*, with *notes*, intended to guard the author's countrymen against his political principles. It is now printed again in *England* without them; not with a view to inflame the minds of any against the present measures of government, but to inculcate the great moral and religious instructions which it contains on persons of all parties; who, if they will read without prejudice, must acknowledge, that whatever be the truth with regard to the present unhappy contest between Great Britain and America, the discourse contains many admirable hints of advice, which, if properly regarded, will tend to the prosperity of both countries. Should the author be considered in the most unfavourable light, the old
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and well-known maxim may be justly adopted here,

Fas est ab Hoste doceri.

And it is hoped, that the decency and moderation which so warm and interested an advocate on the part of the Americans discovers, may tend to promote the same spirit in those readers on this side the Atlantic, who have made themselves parties in the same cause, as well as to moderate the resentment of their most zealous opponents; and to promote in good men, on both sides, (for such there are on both) an hearty disposition “to seek the things which make for PEACE,” and above all, to promote that “RIGHTEOUSNESS which alone exalteth a nation.”

* * * The Author's *Address to the Natives of Scotland residing in America*, which accompanied this Sermon, may be had in a few days separate.

most hurtful and distressing, and to persons the

all his creatures and all their actions. Thus we

are told, that his will is done, and his

and **P S A L M LXXVI. 10.**

even to the most impetuous and disorderly

Surely the Wrath of Man shall praise thee, and the

remainder of Wrath shalt thou restrain.

of Jehovah. They carry his commission

and obey his orders, they are united and restrain

THERE is not a greater evidence either

of the reality or the power of religion,

than a firm belief of God's universal presence,

and a constant attention to the influence and

operation of his Providence. It is by this means

that the Christian may be said, in the emphati-

cal scripture-language, *to walk with God,* and

to endure as seeing him that is invisible.

The doctrine of Divine Providence is very

full and compleat in the sacred oracles. It ex-

tends not only to things which we think of great

moment, and therefore worthy of notice, but to

things the most indifferent and inconsiderable.

Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? says

our Lord, *and one of them shall not fall on the*

ground without your father. But *the very hairs*

of your head are all numbered. It extends not

only to things beneficial and salutary, or to the

direction and assistance of those who are the ser-

vants of the living God, but to things seemingly

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most hurtful and destructive, and to persons the most refractory and disobedient. He over-rules all his creatures and all their actions. Thus we are told, that *fire, hail, snow, vapour and stormy wind, fulfil his word in the course of nature*, and even so the most impetuous and disorderly passions of men, that are under no restraint from themselves, are yet perfectly subject to the dominion of Jehovah. They carry his commission and obey his orders, they are limited and restrained by his authority, and they conspire with every thing else in promoting his glory. There is the greater need to take notice of this, as men are not in general sufficiently aware of the distinction between the law of God and his purpose. They are apt to suppose, that, as the temper of the sinner is contrary to the one, so the outrages of the sinner are able to defeat the other; than which nothing can be more false. The truth is plainly asserted and nobly expressed by the Psalmist in the text. *Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee, and the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.*

This psalm was evidently composed as a song of praise for some signal victory obtained, which was at the same time a remarkable deliverance from threatening danger. The author was one or other of the later prophets, and the occasion probably the unsuccessful assault of Jerusalem by the army of *Sennacherib*, king of Assyria, in the days of Hezekiah. Great was the insolence and

and boasting of his generals and servants against the city of the living God, as may be seen in the thirty sixth chapter of Isaiah. Yet it pleased God to destroy their enemies, and by his own immediate interposition, to grant them deliverance. Therefore the Psalmist says in the 5th and 6th verses of this psalm, *The stout-hearted are spoiled, they have slept their sleep: and none of the men of might have found their hands. At thy rebuke, O God of Jacob, both the chariot and horse are cast into a dead sleep.* After a few more remarks to the same purpose he draws the inference, or makes the reflection in the text: *Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee, and the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.* Which may be paraphrased thus: The fury and injustice of oppressors shall bring in a tribute of praise to thee: the influence of thy righteous Providence shall be clearly discerned: the countenance and support thou wilt give to thine own people shall be gloriously illustrated: thou shalt set the bounds which the boldest cannot pass.

I am sensible, my brethren, that the time and occasion of this Psalm may seem to be, in one respect, ill suited to the interest and circumstances of this country at present. It was composed after the victory was obtained, whereas we are but *putting on the barness*, and entering upon an important contest, the length of which it is impossible to foresee, and the issue of which it will perhaps be thought presumption to fore-

tell. But as the truth, with respect to God's moral government, is the same and unchangeable, and the issue in the case of Senacherib's invasion did but lead the prophet to acknowledge it, our duty and interest conspire in calling upon us to improve it. And I have chosen to insist upon it, on this day of solemn humiliation, as it will probably help us to a clear and explicit view of what should be the chief subject of our prayers and endeavours, as well as the great object of our hope and trust, in our present situation.

The truth, then, asserted in this text, which I propose to illustrate and improve, is—That all the disorderly passions of men, whether exposing the innocent to private injury, or whether they are the arrows of divine judgment in public calamities, shall in the end be to the praise of God. Or, to apply it more particularly to the present state of the American Colonies, and the plague of war, the ambition of mistaken princes, the cunning and cruelty of oppressive and corrupt ministers, and even the inhumanity of brutal soldiers, however dreadful, shall finally promote the glory of God. And in the mean time, while the storm continues, his mercy and kindness shall appear in prescribing bounds to their rage and fury.

In discoursing of the subject, it is my intention, through the assistance of Divine grace,

I. To point out to you, in some particulars, how the wrath of man praises God.

II. To apply these principles to our present situation, by inferences of truth for your instruction and comfort, and by suitable exhortations to duty in the important crisis.

I. In the first place I am to point out to you in some particulars, how the wrath of man praises God.

I say in *some* instances, because it is far from being my purpose to mention or explain the whole. There is an unsearchable depth in the divine counsels which it is impossible for us to penetrate. It is the duty of every good man to place the most unlimited confidence in divine wisdom, and to believe that those measures of Providence that are most unintelligible to him, are yet planned with the same skill, and directed to the same great purposes, as others, the reason and tendency of which he can explain in the clearest manner. But where revelation and experience enable us to discover the wisdom, equity or mercy of divine Providence, nothing can be more delightful or profitable to a serious mind, and therefore I beg your attention to the following remarks.

I. In the first place, the wrath of man praises God, as it is an example and illustration of divine

vine truth, and clearly points out the corruption of our nature, which is the foundation stone of the doctrine of redemption.

Nothing can be more absolutely necessary to true religion, than a clear and full conviction of the sinfulness of our nature and state. Without this, there can be neither repentance in the sinner, nor humility in the believer. Without this, all that is said in Scripture of the wisdom and mercy of God in providing a Saviour, is without force and without meaning. Justly does our Saviour say, *The whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.* Those who are not sensible that they are sinners, will treat every exhortation to repentance, and every offer of mercy, with disdain or defiance.

But where can we have a more affecting view of the corruption of our nature than in the *wrath of man*, when exerting itself in oppression, cruelty, and blood? It must be owned, indeed, that this truth is abundantly manifest in times of the greatest tranquillity. Others may, if they please, treat the corruption of our nature as a chimera. For my part, I see it every where, and I feel it every day. All the disorders in human society, and the greatest part even of the unhappiness we are exposed to, arises from the envy, malice, covetousness, and other lusts of men. If we and all around us were just what we ought to be in all respects, we should not need to go
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any farther for heaven, for it would be upon earth. But war and violence present a spectacle still more awful. How affecting is it to think, that the lust of domination should be so violent and universal; that men should be so rarely satisfied with their own possessions and acquisitions, or even with the benefit that would arise from mutual service, but should look upon the happiness and tranquillity of others as an obstruction to their own: that, as if the great law of nature were not enough "Dust thou art, and to dust thou shalt return," they should be so furiously set for the destruction of each other! 'Tis shocking to think, since the first murder of Abel, by his brother Cain, what havock has been made of man by man in every age. What is it that fills the pages of history, but the wars and contentions of princes and empires! What vast numbers has lawless ambition brought into the field, and delivered as a prey to the destructive sword!

If we dwell a little upon the circumstances, they become deeply affecting. The mother bears a child with pain, rears him by the laborious attendance of many years, yet in the prime of life, in the vigour of health, and bloom of beauty, in a moment he is cut down by the dreadful instruments of death. *Every battle of the warrior is with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood.* But the horror of the scene is not confined to the field of slaughter; few go there unrelated, or fall unlamented. In every hostile encounter,

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what must be the impression upon the relations of the deceased? The bodies of the dead can only be seen, and the cries of the dying heard, for a single day; but many days shall not put an end to the mourning of a parent for a beloved son, the joy and support of his age, or of the widow and helpless orphan for a father taken away in the fulness of health and vigour.

But, if this may be justly said of all wars between man and man, what shall we be able to say that is suitable to the abhorred scene of civil war between citizen and citizen? How deeply affecting is it that those who are the same in complexion, the same in blood, in language and in religion, should, notwithstanding, butcher one another with unrelenting rage, and glory in the deed! That men should lay waste the fields of their fellow subjects with whose provision they themselves had been often fed, and consume with devouring fire those houses in which they had often found a hospitable shelter! These things are apt to overcome a weak mind with fear, or overwhelm it with sorrow, and in the greatest number are apt to excite the highest indignation, and kindle up a spirit of revenge. If this last has no other tendency than to direct and invigorate the measures of self-defence, I do not take upon me to blame it, on the contrary I call it necessary and laudable.

But what I mean at this time to prove by the preceding reflections, and wish to impress on your
minds,

minds, is, the depravity of human nature. *From whence come wars and fightings among you,* says the apostle James *, *come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?* Men of lax and corrupt principles take great delight in speaking to the praise of human nature, and extolling its dignity, without distinguishing what it was at its first creation, from what it is in its present fallen estate. These fine speculations are very grateful to a worldly mind. They are also much more pernicious to uncautious and unthinking youth, than even the temptations to a dissolute and sensual life, against which they are fortified by the dictates of natural conscience, and a sense of publick shame. But I appeal from these visionary reasonings to the history of all ages, and the inflexible testimony of daily experience. These will tell us what men have been in their practice, and from thence you may judge what they are by nature while unrenewed. If I am not much mistaken, a cool and candid attention either to the past history or present state of the world, but above all to the ravages of lawless power, ought to humble us in the dust. It should at once lead us to acknowledge the just view given us in scripture of our lost state: to desire the happy influence of renewing grace, each for ourselves, and to long for the dominion of righteousness and peace, when men shall *beat their swords into plough-*

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* James iv. 1.

plough-shares, and their spears into pruning-hooks: when nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.*

2. The wrath of man praises God, as it is the instrument in his hands for bringing sinners to repentance, and for the correction and improvement of his own children.

Whatever be the nature of the afflictions with which he visits either persons, families, or nations, whatever be the dispositions or intentions of those whose malice he employs as a scourge, the design on his part is to rebuke men for iniquity, to bring them to repentance, and to promote their holiness and peace. The salutary nature and sanctifying influence of affliction in general is often taken notice of in scripture, both as making a part of the purpose of God, and the experience of his saints. *Now no affliction*, says the apostle, *is for the present joyous but grievous. Nevertheless, it yieldeth afterwards the peaceable fruits of righteousness to them who are exercised thereby* †. But what we are particularly led to observe, by the subject of this discourse, is, that the wrath of man, or the violence of the oppressor, praises God in this respect, for it has a peculiar tendency to alarm the secure conscience, to convince and humble the obstinate sinner: this is plain from the nature of the thing, and from the testimony of experience.

Publick

* Mic. iv. 3: † Heb. xii. 11.

Publick calamity, particularly the destroying sword, is so awful that it cannot but have a powerful influence in leading men to consider the presence and the power of God. It threatens them not only in themselves, but touches them in all that is dear to them, whether relations or possessions. The prophet Isaiah says, *Yea, in the way of thy judgments, O Lord, have we waited for thee; for when thy judgments are in the earth the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness* *. He considers it as the most powerful means of alarming the secure and subduing the obstinate. *Lord, when thy hand is lifted up they will not see; but they shall see, and be ashamed for their envy at the people: yea, the fire of thine enemies shall devour them* †. It is also sometimes represented as a symptom of a hopeless and irrecoverable state when publick calamities have no effect. Thus saith the prophet, *O Lord, thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction: they have made their faces harder than a rock, they have refused to return* ‡.

We can easily see, in the history of the Israelites, how severe strokes brought them to submission and penitence. *When he slew them then they sought him, and they returned and enquired early after God, and they remember-*

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* Isa. xxvi. 8. 9. † v. 11. ‡ Jer. v. 3.

*ed that God was their rock and the high God their Redeemer *.*

Both nations in general, and private persons, are apt to grow remiss and lax in a time of prosperity and seeming security, but when their earthly comforts are endangered or withdrawn, it lays them under a kind of necessity to seek for something better in their place. Men must have comfort from one quarter or another. When earthly things are in a pleasing and promising condition, too many are apt to *find their rest*, and be satisfied with them as their own portion. But when the vanity and passing nature of all created comfort is discovered, they are compelled to look for something more durable as well as valuable. What therefore can be more to the praise of God than that, when a whole people have *forgotten their resting place*, when they have abused their privileges, and despised their mercies, they should by distress and sufferings be made to *bearken to the rod*, and return to their duty.

There is an inexpressible depth and variety in the judgments of God, as in all his other works, but we may lay down this as a certain principle, that if there were no sin there could be no sufferings, therefore they are certainly for the correction of sin, or for the trial, illustration, and perfecting of the graces and virtues of his own people. We are not to suppose that those

* Psal. lxxviii. 34. 35.

those who suffer most, or who suffer soonest, are therefore more criminal than others. Our Saviour himself thought it necessary to give a caution against this rash conclusion, as we are informed by the evangelist *. *Suppose ye that these Galileans (whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices) were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you nay, but except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish.*

I suppose we may say, with sufficient warrant, that it often happens that those for whom God has designs of the greatest mercy are first brought to the trial, that they may enjoy in due time the salutary effects of the unpalatable medicine.

I must also take leave to observe, and I hope no pious humble sufferer will be unwilling to make the application, that there is often a discernable mixture of sovereignty and righteousness in providential dispensations. It is the prerogative of God to do what he will with his own, but he often displays his justice itself, by throwing into the furnace of affliction those, who, though they may not be visibly worse than others, may yet have more to answer for as having been favoured with more distinguished privileges both civil and sacred. It is impossible for us to make a just and full comparison of the characters either of

* Luke xiii. 1—4.

of persons or nations, and it would be extremely foolish for any to attempt it, either for increasing their own security, or impeaching the justice of the supreme Ruler. Let us therefore neither forget the truth, nor go beyond it. *His mercy fills the earth: he is also known by the judgment which he executeth.* The wrath of man, in its most tempestuous rage, fulfils his will and finally promotes the good of his church.

3. The wrath of man praises God, as he sets bounds to it, or restrains it by his providence, and sometimes makes it evidently a means of promoting and illustrating his glory.

There is no part of divine Providence in which a greater beauty and majesty appears, than when the almighty Ruler turns the counsels of wicked men into confusion, and makes them militate against themselves. If the psalmist may be thought to have a view in this text to the truths illustrated in the two former observations, there is no doubt at all that he had a particular view to this, as he says in the latter part of the verse, *the remainder of wrath thou shalt restrain.* The scripture abounds with instances in which the designs of oppressors were either wholly disappointed, or in execution fell far short of the malice of their intentions, and in some they turned out to the honour and happiness of the persons or the people whom they intended to destroy. We have an instance of the
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the first of these in the history to which my text relates *. We have also an instance in Esther, in which the most mischievous designs of Haman, the son of Hamedatha the Agagite, against Mordecai the Jew, and the nation from which he sprung, turned out to his own destruction, the honour of Mordecai, and the salvation and peace of his people. From the new testament I will make choice of a memorable event, on which the salvation of believers in every age rests as its foundation, the death and sufferings of the Son of God. This the great adversary and all his agents and instruments prosecuted with unrelenting rage. When they had blackened him with slander, when they scourged him with shame, when they had condemned him in judgment, and nailed him to the cross, how could they help esteeming their victory compleat? But, O the unsearchable wisdom of God! they were but perfecting the great design laid for the salvation of sinners. Our blessed Redeemer by his death finished his work, overcame principalities and powers, and made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in his cross. With how much justice do his apostles and their companions offer this doxology to God. *They lift up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God which hast made heaven and earth and the sea,*
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* The matter is fully stated and reasoned upon by the prophet Isaiah, chap. x. 5—19.

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*and all that in them is : who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things ? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done *.*

In all after-ages, in conformity to this, the deepest laid contrivances of the prince of darkness have turned to the confusion of their author. And I know not but, considering his malice and pride, this perpetual disappointments, and the superiority of divine wisdom, may be one great source of his suffering and torment. The cross has still been the banner of truth, under which it hath been carried through the world. Persecution has been as the furnace to the gold to purge it of its dross, to manifest its purity and encrease its lustre. It was taken notice of very early, that the blood of the martyrs was the seed of christianity. The more abundantly it was shed the more plentifully did the harvest grow.

So certain has this appeared, that the most violent infidels, both of early and of later ages, have endeavoured to account for it, and have observed,

* Acts iv. 24--28.

observed, that there is a spirit of obstinacy in man which inclines him to resist violence, and that severity doth but encrease opposition, be the cause what it will. They suppose that persecution is equally proper to propagate truth and error. This, though in part true, will by no means generally hold. Such an apprehension, however, gave occasion to a glorious triumph of divine Providence, of an opposite kind, which I must briefly relate to you. One of the Roman emperors, Julian, surnamed the Apostate, perceiving how impossible it was to suppress the Gospel by violence, endeavoured to extinguish it by neglect and scorn. He left the christians unmolested for some time, but gave all manner of encouragement to those of opposite principles, and particularly the Jews, out of hatred to the christians, and that he might bring publick disgrace upon the Galileans, as he affected to stile them. He encouraged the Jews to rebuild the temple of Jerusalem, and visibly refute the prophecy of Christ that it should lie under perpetual desolation. But this profane attempt was so singularly frustrated, that it served as much as any one circumstance to spread the glory of our Redeemer, and establish the faith of his saints. It is affirmed by some ancient authors, particularly by *Ammianus Marcellinus*, a heathen historian, that fire came out of the earth and consumed the workmen when laying the foundation. But in whatever way it

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was prevented, it is beyond all controversy, from the concurring testimony of heathens and christians, that little or no progress was ever made in it, and that in a short time it was entirely defeated.

It is proper here to observe that at the time of the reformation, when religion began to revive, nothing contributed more to facilitate its reception and encrease its progress than the violence of its persecutors. Their cruelty, and the patience of the sufferers, naturally disposed men to examine and weigh the cause to which they adhered with so much constancy and resolution. At the same time also when they were persecuted in one city they fled to another, and carried the discoveries of popish fraud to every part of the world. It was by some of these, who were persecuted in Germany, that the light of the reformation was so early brought into Britain.

The power of divine Providence appears with the more distinguished lustre, when small and inconsiderable circumstances, and sometimes the weather and seasons, have defeated the most formidable armaments, and frustrated the best concerted expeditions. Near two hundred years ago the monarchy of Spain was in the height of its power and glory, and determined to crush the interest of the reformation. They sent out a powerful armament against Britain, giving it ostentatiously, and in my opinion, profanely, the name of the *Invincible Armada*.

Armada. But it pleased God so entirely to discomfit it by tempests, that a small part of it returned home, though no British force had been opposed to it at all.

We have a remarkable instance of the influence of small circumstances in Providence in the English history. The two most remarkable persons in the civil wars had earnestly desired to withdraw themselves from the contentions of the times, Mr. Hampden and Oliver Cromwell. They had actually taken their passage in a ship for New England, when, by an arbitrary order of council, they were compelled to remain at home. The consequence of this was, that one of them was the soul of the republican opposition to a monarchical usurpation during the civil wars; and the other, in the course of the contest, was the great instrument in bringing the tyrant to the block.

The only other historical remark I am to make is, that the violent persecutions which many eminent christians met with in England, from their brethren who called themselves protestants, drove them in great numbers, to a distant part of the world, where the light of the Gospel and true religion were unknown. Some of the American settlements, particularly those in New England, were chiefly made by them; and as they carried the knowledge of Christ to the dark places of the earth, so they continue themselves in as great a degree of purity of

faith and strictness of practice, or rather greater than is to be found in any part of the protestant world. Does not the wrath of man, in this instance, praise God? Was not the accuser of the brethren, who stirs up their enemies, thus taken in his own craftiness, and his kingdom shaken by the very means he employed to establish it? *

II. I proceed to the second general head, which was to apply the principles illustrated above to our present situation, by inferences of truth for your instruction and comfort, and by suitable exhortations to duty in this important crisis. And,

1. In the first place I would take the opportunity on this occasion, and from this subject, to press every hearer to a sincere concern for his own soul's salvation.

There are times when the mind may be expected to be more awake to divine truth, and the conscience more open to the arrows of conviction, than at another. A season of publick judgment

* Left this should be thought a temporizing compliment to the people of New England, who have been the first sufferers in the present contest, and have set so noble an example of invincible fortitude in withstanding the violence of oppression, I think it proper to observe, that the whole paragraph is copied from a sermon on Ps. lxxiv. 22, prepared and preached in Scotland in the month of August, 1758.

judgment is of this kind, as appears from what has been already said. That curiosity and attention, at least, are raised in some degree is plain from the unusual throng of this assembly. Can you have a clearer view of the sinfulness of your nature than when the rod of the oppressor is lifted up, and you see men putting on the habit of the warrior, and collecting on every hand the weapons of hostility and instruments of death? I do not blame your ardour in preparing for the resolute defence of your temporal rights. But consider, I beseech you, the truly infinite importance of the salvation of your souls. Is it of much moment whether you and your children shall be rich or poor, at liberty or in bonds? Is it of much moment whether this beautiful country shall encrease in fruitfulness from year to year, being cultivated by active industry, and possessed by independent freemen, or the scanty produce of the neglected fields shall be eaten up by hungry publicans, while the timid owner trembles at the tax-gatherer's approach? And is it of less moment, my brethren, whether you shall be the heirs of glory, or the heirs of hell? Is your state on earth, for a few fleeting years, of so much moment? and is it of less moment what shall be your state through endless ages? Have you assembled together willingly to hear what shall be said on publick affairs, and to join in imploring the blessing of God on the counsels and arms

arms of the United Colonies? and can you be unconcerned what shall become of you for ever, when all the monuments of human greatness shall be laid in ashes? *For the earth itself, and all the works that are therein shall be burnt up.* Wherefore, my beloved brethren, as the ministry of reconciliation is committed to me, I beseech you, in the most earnest manner, to attend to the things that belong to your peace before they are hid from your eyes. How soon, and in what manner a seal shall be set upon the character and state of every person here present, it is impossible to know, for he who alone can know does not think proper to reveal it. But you may rest assured that there is no time more suitable, and there is none so safe, as that which is present: since it is wholly uncertain whether any other shall be yours. Those who shall first fall in battle have not many warnings to receive. There are some few daring and hardened sinners who despise eternity itself, and set their Maker at defiance; but the far greater number, by staving off their convictions to a more *convenient season*, have been taken unprepared and thus eternally lost. I would therefore earnestly press the apostle's exhortation (2 Cor. vi. 1, 2.) *We then as workers together with God, beseech you that ye receive not the grace of God in vain. Behold now is the accepted time, behold now is the day of salvation* Suffer me now to beseech you, or rather to give you warning, not to rest satisfied

sted with a form of godliness denying the power thereof. There can be no true religion till there be a discovery of your lost state by nature and practice, and an unfeigned acceptance of Christ Jesus as he is offered in the gospel. Unhappy they who either despise his mercy or are ashamed of his cross. Believe it, *there is no salvation in any other; neither is there any other name given under heaven among men whereby we must be saved.* Unless you are united to him by a living faith, not the resentment of a haughty monarch, but the sword of divine justice hangs over you, and the fulness of divine vengeance shall speedily overtake you. I do not speak this only to the heaven-daring profligate, or grovelling sensualist, but to every insensible sinner: to all those, however decent and orderly in their civil deportment, who live to themselves and have their part and portion in this life. In fine, to all who are yet in a state of nature; *for except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.* The fear of man may make you hide your profanity: prudence and experience may make you abhor intemperance and riot. As you advance in life one vice may supplant another, and hold its place, but nothing less than the sovereign grace of God can produce a saving change of heart and temper, or fit you for his immediate presence.

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2. From what has been said upon this subject you may see what ground there is to give praise to God for his favours already bestowed upon us respecting the publick cause.

It would be a criminal inattention not to observe the singular interposition of Providence hitherto in behalf of the American colonies. It is, however, impossible for me in a single discourse, as well as improper at this time, to go through every step of our past transactions, I must therefore content myself with a few remarks. How many discoveries have been made of the designs of enemies in Brit^{ain} and among ourselves, in a manner as unexpected to us as to them, and in such season as to prevent their effect. What surprising success has attended our encounters in almost every instance. Has not the boasted discipline of regular and veteran soldiers been turned into confusion and dismay by the new and maiden courage of freemen, in defence of their property and right? In what great mercy has blood been spared on the side of this injured country. Some important victories in the South have been gained with so little loss, that enemies will probably think it has been dissembled, as many even of ourselves thought, till time rendered it undeniable. But these were comparatively of small moment. The signal advantage we have gained by the evacuation of Boston, and the shameful flight of the army and navy of Britain, was brought about

about without the loss of a single man. To all this we may add, that the counsels of our enemies have been visibly confounded, so that I believe I may say, with truth, that there is hardly any step which they have taken but it has operated strongly against themselves, and been more in our favour than if they had followed a contrary course.

While we praise God the supreme Disposer of all events, for his interposition in our behalf, let us guard against the dangerous error of trusting in or boasting of an *arm of flesh*. I could earnestly wish, that while our arms are crowned with success we might content ourselves with a modest ascription of it to the power of the Highest. It has given me great uneasiness to read some ostentatious vaunting expressions in our new-papers, though happily, I think, much restrained of late. Let us not return to them again. If I am not mistaken, not only the holy scriptures in general, and the truths of the gospel in particular, but the whole course of Providence seems intended to abase the pride of man, and lay the vain-glorious in the dust. How many instances does history furnish us with of those who, after exulting over and despising their enemies, were singularly and shamefully defeated. The truth is, I believe the remark may be applied universally, and we may say, that through the whole frame of nature, and the whole system of human life, that

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which promises most, performs the least. The flowers of finest colour seldom have the sweetest fragrance. The trees of quickest growth, or fairest form, are seldom of the greatest value or duration. Deep waters move with the least noise. Men who think most are seldom talkative. And, I think it holds as much in war as in any thing, that every boaster is a coward.

Pardon me, my brethren, for insisting so much on this, which may seem but an immaterial circumstance. It is, in my opinion, of very great moment. I look upon ostentation and confidence, to be a sort of outrage upon providence. And when it becomes general, and infuses itself into the spirit of a people, it is a sure forerunner of destruction. How does Goliath the champion, armed in a most formidable manner, express his disdain of David the stripling, with his sling and stone. *And when the Philistine looked about and saw David, he despised him, for he was but a youth, and ruddy, and of a fair countenance. And the Philistine said unto David, am I a dog, that thou comest to me with staves? And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. And the Philistine said to David, Come to me, and I will give thy flesh unto the fowls of the air, and to the beasts of the field. But how just and modest the reply. Then said David to the Philistine, Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come unto thee in the name of*

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of the Lord of Hosts, the God of the armies of Israel whom thou hast defied.*

I was well pleased with a remark of this kind thirty years ago, in a pamphlet †, in which it was observed, that there was a great deal of profane ostentation in the names given to the ships of war, as the Victory, the Valiant, the Thunderer, the Dread-nought, the Terrible, the Fire-brand, the Furnace, the Lightning, the Infernal, and many more of the same kind ‡. This the author considered as a symptom of their national character and manners, very unfavourable, and not likely to obtain the blessing of the God of Heaven.

3. From what has been said, you may learn what encouragement you have to put your trust

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* 1 Sam. xvii. 42—45. † Britain's Remembrancer.

‡ I am sensible that two or three of these were ships taken from the French, which brought their names with them; but the greatest number had their names imposed in England. And I cannot help observing, that *The Victory*, often celebrated as the finest ship ever built in Britain, was lost in the night, without a storm, by some unknown accident, and about 1200 persons, many of them of the first families in the nation, were buried in the deep. I do not mean to infer any thing from this, but that we ought to live under the practical persuasion of what no man will doctrinally deny, that there is no warring with the elements, or him who directs their force; that he is able to write disappointment on the wisest human schemes, and, by the word of his power, to frustrate the efforts of the greatest monarch upon earth.

in God, and hope for his assistance in the present important conflict.

He is the Lord of Hosts, great in might, and strong in battle. Whosoever hath his countenance and approbation, shall have the best at last. I do not mean to speak prophetically, but agreeably to the analogy of faith, and the principles of God's moral government. Some have observed, that true religion, and in her train, dominion, riches, literature, and arts, have taken their course in a slow and gradual manner, from East to West, since the earth was settled after the flood: and from thence forebode the future glory of America. I leave this as a matter rather of conjecture than certainty; but observe—that if your cause is just—if your principles are pure—and if your conduct is prudent, you need not fear the multitude of opposing hosts.

If your cause is just, you may look with confidence to the Lord, and entreat him to plead it as his own. You are all my witnesses, that this is the first time of my introducing any political subject into the pulpit. At this season, however, it is not only lawful, but necessary; and I will embrace the opportunity of declaring my opinion, without any hesitation, that the cause in which America is now in arms, is the cause of justice, of liberty, and of human nature. So far as we have hitherto proceeded, I am satisfied that the confederacy of the colonies

nies has not been the effect of pride, resentment, or sedition, but of a deep and general conviction, that our civil and religious liberties, and consequently, in a great measure, the temporal and eternal happiness of us and our posterity, depended on the issue. The knowledge of God and his truths have, from the beginning of the world, been chiefly, if not entirely, confined to those parts of the earth where some degree of liberty and political justice were to be seen, and great were the difficulties with which they had to struggle, from the imperfection of human society, and the unjust decisions of usurped authority. There is not a single instance in history, in which civil liberty was lost, and religious liberty preserved entire. If, therefore, we yield up our temporal property, we, at the same time, deliver the conscience into bondage.

You shall not, my brethren, hear from me in the pulpit, what you never have heard from me in conversation; I mean, railing at the king personally, or even at his ministers, and the parliament, and the people of Britain, as so many barbarous savages. Many of their actions have probably been worse than their intentions. That they should desire unlimited dominion, if they can obtain or preserve it, is neither new nor wonderful. I do not refuse submission to their unjust claims because they are corrupt and profligate, although probably many of them are
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so, but because they are *men*, and therefore liable to all the selfish biases inseparable from human nature. I call these claims unjust, of making laws to bind us in all cases whatever, because they are separated from us, independent of us, and have an interest in opposing us.

“ Would any man, who could prevent it, give up his estate, person, and family, to the disposal of his neighbour, although he had liberty to chuse the wisest and best master? Surely not. This is the true and proper hinge of the controversy between Great Britain and America. It is, however, to be added, that such is their distance from us, that a wise and prudent administration of our affairs is as impossible, as the claim of authority is unjust. Such is and must be their ignorance of the state of things here, so much time must elapse before any errors can be seen and remedied, and so much injustice and partiality must be expected from the arts and misrepresentations of interested persons, that for these colonies to depend wholly upon the legislature of Great Britain, would be, like many other oppressive connexions, injury to the master, and ruin to the slave.”

“ The management of the war itself, on their part, would furnish new proof of this, if any were needful. Is it not manifest with what absurdity and impropriety they have conducted their own designs? We had nothing so much to fear as dissention, and they have, by wanton
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and unnecessary cruelty, forced us into union. At the same time, to let us see what we have to expect, and what would be the fatal consequences of unlimited submission, they have uniformly called those acts *lenity*, which filled this whole continent with resentment and horror. The ineffable disdain expressed by our fellow subject, "That he would not hearken to "America till she was at his feet," has armed more men, and inspired more deadly rage, than could have been done by laying waste a whole province with fire and sword. Again, we wanted not numbers, but time, and they sent over handful after handful, till we were ready to oppose a multitude greater than they have to send. In fine, if there was one place stronger than the rest, and more able and willing to resist, there they made the attack, and left the others till they were duly informed, completely incensed, and fully furnished with instruments of war. "

I mention these things, my brethren, not only as grounds of confidence in God, who can easily overthrow the wisdom of the wise, but as decisive proofs of the impossibility of these great and growing states being safe and happy, when every part of their internal polity is dependent on Great Britain. "If, on account of their distance and ignorance of our situation, they could not conduct their own quarrel with
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propriety for one year, how can they give direction and vigour to every department of our civil constitution from age to age? "There are fixed bounds to every thing human. When the branches of a tree grow very large and weighty, they fall off from the trunk. The sharpest sword will not pierce where it cannot reach. And there is a certain distance from the seat of government, where an attempt to rule will either produce tyranny and helpless subjection, or provoke resistance, and effect separation."

I have said—If your principles are pure—the meaning of which is, if your present opposition to the claims of the British ministry does not arise from a seditious and turbulent spirit, or a wanton contempt of legal authority, from a blind and factious attachment to particular persons or parties, or from a selfish rapacious disposition, and a desire to turn publick confusion to private profit; but from a concern for the interest of your country, and the safety of yourselves and your posterity. On this subject I cannot help observing, that though it would be a miracle if there were not many selfish persons among us, and discoveries now and then made of mean and interested transactions, yet they have been comparatively inconsiderable both in number and effect. In general there has been so great a degree of public spirit, that we have much more reason to be thankful for its
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vigour and prevalence, than to wonder at the few appearances of dishonesty or disaffection. It would be very uncandid to ascribe the universal ardour that has prevailed among all ranks of men, and the spirited exertions in the most distant colonies, to any thing else than publick spirit. Nor was there ever perhaps in history so general a commotion, from which religious differences have been so entirely excluded. Nothing of this kind has as yet been heard, except of late in the absurd, but malicious and detestable attempts of a few remaining enemies to introduce them. At the same time I must also, for the honour of this country, observe, that though government, in the ancient form, has been so long unhinged, and, in some colonies, not sufficient care taken to substitute another in its place, yet has there been, by common consent, a much greater degree of order and publick peace, than men of reflection and experience foretold, or could expect. From all these circumstances, I conclude favourably of the principles of the friends of liberty, and do earnestly exhort you to adopt and act upon those which have been described, and resist the influence of every other.

Once more: If to the justice of your cause, and the purity of your principles, you add prudence in your conduct, there will be the greatest reason to hope, by the blessing of God, for prosperity and success. By prudence in

conducting this important struggle, I have chiefly in view union, firmness, and patience. Every body must perceive the absolute necessity of union. It is, indeed, in every body's mouth, and therefore, instead of attempting to convince you of its importance, I will only caution you against the usual causes of division. If persons of every rank, instead of implicitly complying with the orders of those whom they themselves have chosen to direct, will needs judge every measure over again when it comes to be put in execution; if different classes of men intermix their little private views, or clashing interests, with public affairs, and marshal into parties the merchant against the landholder, and the landholder against the merchant; if local provincial pride and jealousy arise, and you allow yourselves to speak with contempt of the courage, character, manners, or even language, of particular places, you are doing a greater injury to the common cause, than you are aware of. If such practices are admitted among us, I shall look upon it as one of the most dangerous symptoms, and if they become general, of approaching ruin.

By firmness and patience I mean, a resolute adherence to your duty, and laying your account with many difficulties, as well as occasional disappointments. In a former part of this discourse, I have cautioned you against ostenta-

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tion and vain glory. Be pleased further to observe, that extreams often beget one another; and the same persons who exult extravagantly on success, are generally most liable to dispondent timidity on every little inconsiderable defeat. Men of this character are the corruption of every society or party to which they belong, but they are especially the ruin of an army if suffered to continue in it. Remember the vicissitudes of human things, and the usual course of providence. How often has a just cause been reduced to the lowest ebb, and yet, when firmly adhered to, has become finally triumphant. I speak of this now, while the affairs of the colonies are in so prosperous a state, lest this prosperity itself should render you less able to bear unexpected misfortunes.

The sum of the whole is, that the blessing of God is only to be looked for by those who are not wanting in the discharge of their own duty. I would neither have you to trust in an arm of flesh, nor sit, with folded hands, and expect that miracles should be wrought in your defence. This is a sin, which, in scripture, is styled *tempting God*. In opposition to it, I would exhort you as Joab did the host of Israel; who, though he does not appear to have had a spotless character throughout, certainly, in this instance, spoke like a prudent general, and a pious man. *Be of good courage, and let us*

play the men for our people, and for the cities of our God, and the Lord do that which seemeth him good.*

I shall now conclude this discourse by some exhortations to duty, founded upon the truths which have been illustrated above, and suited to the interesting state of this country at the present time. And

1. Give me leave to recommend to you an attention to the public interests of religion, or, in other words, zeal for the glory of God, and the good of others.

I have already endeavoured to exhort sinners to repentance. What I have here in view, is to point out to you the concern which every good man ought to take in the national character and manners, and the means which he ought to use for promoting public virtue, and bearing down impiety and vice. This is a matter of the utmost moment, and which ought to be well understood both in its nature and principles. Nothing is more certain, than that a general profligacy and corruption of manners, makes a people ripe for destruction. A good form of government may hold the rotten materials together for some time, but beyond a certain pitch, even the best constitution will be ineffectual, and slavery must ensue. On the other hand, when the manners of a nation are

pure,

pure, when true religion and internal principles maintain their vigour, the attempts of the most powerful enemies to oppress them are commonly baffled and disappointed. This will be found equally certain, whether we consider the great principles of God's moral government, or the operation and influence of natural causes.

What follows from this? That he is the best friend to American liberty, who is most sincere and active in promoting true and undefiled religion, and who sets himself, with the greatest firmness, to bear down profanity and immorality of every kind. Whoever is an avowed enemy to God, I scruple not to call him an enemy to his country. Do not suppose, my brethen, that I mean to recommend furious and angry zeal for the circumstantial of religion, or the contentions of one sect of religion with another, about their peculiar distinctions. I do not wish to oppose any body's religion, but every body's wickedness. Perhaps there are no surer marks of the reality of religion, than when a man feels himself more joined in spirit to a truly holy person of a different denomination, than to an irregular liver of his own. It is therefore your duty in this important and critical season to exert yourselves, every one in his proper sphere, to stem the tide of prevailing vice, to promote the knowledge of God, the reverence of his name and worship, and obedience to his laws.

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Perhaps you will ask, what it is that you are called to do for this purpose, further than your own personal duty? I answer, this itself, when taken in its proper extent, is not little. The nature and obligation of visible religion is, I am afraid, little understood, and less attended to.

Many, from a real or pretended fear of the imputation of hypocrisy, banish from their conversation and carriage, every appearance of respect and submission to the living God. What a weakness and meanness of spirit does it discover, for a man to be ashamed, in the presence of his fellow-sinners, to profess that reverence to Almighty God which he inwardly feels! The truth is, he makes himself truly liable to the accusation which he means to avoid. It is as genuine, and perhaps more culpable, hypocrisy, to appear to have less religion than you really have, than to appear to have more. This false shame is a more extensive evil than is commonly apprehended. We contribute constantly, though insensibly, to form each other's characters and manners, and, therefore, the usefulness of a strictly holy and conscientious deportment, is not confined to the possessor, but spreads its happy influence to all that are within its reach. I need scarcely add, that, in proportion as men are distinguished, by understanding, literature, age, rank, office, wealth, or any other circumstance, their example will be useful on the one hand, or pernicious on the other.

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But I cannot content myself with barely recommending a silent example. There is a dignity in virtue which is entitled to authority, and ought to claim it. In many cases, it is the duty of a good man, by open reproof and opposition, to wage war with prophaneness. There is a scripture precept, delivered in very singular terms, to which I beg your attention. *Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thy heart, but thou shalt in any wise, rebuke him, and not suffer sin upon him* *. How prone are many to represent reproof, as flowing from ill-nature and sourness of temper. The spirit of God, on the contrary, considers it as the effect of inward hatred, or want of genuine love, to forbear reproof when it is necessary, or may be useful. I am sensible, there may, in some cases, be a restraint from prudence, agreeable to that caution of our Lord, *Cast not your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you* †. Of this every man must judge as well as he can for himself; but certainly, either by open reproof, or expressive silence, or speedy departure from such society, we ought to guard against being partakers of other men's sins.

To this let me add, that if all men are bound in some degree, *certain classes* of men are under peculiar obligations, to the discharge of this duty. Magistrates, ministers, parents, heads of families,

* Lev. xix. 17.

† Mat. vii. 6.

families, and those whom age has rendered venerable, are called upon to use their authority and influence for the glory of God, and the good of others. Bad men themselves discover an inward conviction of this, for they are often liberal in their reproaches of persons of grave characters or religious profession if they bear with patience the profanity of others. Instead of enlarging on the duty of men in authority in general, I must particularly recommend this matter to those who have the command of soldiers enlisted for the defence of their country. The cause is sacred, and the champions for it ought to be holy. Nothing is more grieving to the heart of a good man, than to hear from those who are going into the field of battle, the horrid sound of cursing and blasphemy. It cools the ardour of his prayers, as well as abates his confidence and hope in God. Many more circumstances affect me in such a case than I can enlarge upon, or indeed easily enumerate at present: the glory of God, the interest of the deluded sinner, going, like a devoted victim, and imprecating vengeance on his own head, as well as the cause itself committed to his care. We have sometimes taken the liberty to forebode the downfall of the British empire, from the corruption and degeneracy of the people. Unhappily the British soldiers have been distinguished among all the nations in Europe, for the most shocking

shocking profanity. Shall we then pretend to emulate them in this infernal distinction, or rob them of the horrid privilege? God forbid! Let the officers of the army, in every degree, remember, that, as military subjection while it lasts is the most compleat of any, it is in their power greatly to restrain, if not wholly to banish, this flagrant enormity.

2. I exhort all who are not called to go into the field, to apply themselves, with the utmost diligence, to works of industry.

It is in your power, by this means, not only to supply the necessities, but to add to the strength of your country. Habits of industry prevailing in a society not only increase its wealth, as their immediate effect, but they prevent the introduction of many vices, and are intimately connected with sobriety and good morals. Idleness is the mother or nurse of almost every vice; and want, which is its inseparable companion, urges men on to the most abandoned and destructive courses. Industry, therefore, is a moral virtue of the greatest moment, absolutely necessary to national prosperity, and the sure way of obtaining the blessing of God. I would also observe, that in this, as well as in every other part of God's government, obedience to his will is as much a natural mean, as a meritorious cause of the advantage we wish to reap from it. Industry brings up a firm and

hardy race. He who is inured to the labour of the field, is prepared for the fatigues of a campaign. The active farmer, who rises with the dawn, and follows his team or plow, must, in the end, be an over-match for those effeminate and delicate soldiers who are nursed in the lap of self-indulgence, and whose greatest exertion is the important preparation for, and tedious attendance on, a masquerade or midnight ball.

3. In the last place, suffer me to recommend to you frugality in your families, and every other article of expence.

This the state of things among us renders absolutely necessary, and it stands in the most immediate connection both with virtuous industry and active public spirit. Temperance in meals, moderation in dress, furniture, and equipage, have, I think, generally been characteristics of a distinguished patriot. And when the same spirit pervades a people in general, they are fit for every duty, and able to encounter the most formidable enemy. The general subject of the preceding discourse has been—The wrath of man praising God. If the unjust oppression of your enemy, which withholds from you many of the usual articles of luxury and magnificence, shall contribute to make you clothe yourselves and your children with the work of your own hands, and cover your tables with
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the salutary productions of your own soil, it will be a new illustration of the same truth, and a real happiness to yourselves and country.

I could wish to have every thing done from the purest and the noblest views. Consider therefore, that the Christian character, particularly the self-denial of the gospel, should extend to your whole deportment. In the early times of Christianity, when adult converts were admitted to baptism, they were asked, among other questions, Do you renounce the world? its shews, its pomp, and its vanities? I do. The form of this is still preserved in the administration of baptism, where we renounce the devil, the world, and the flesh. This certainly implies not only abstaining from gross acts of intemperance and excess, but a humility of carriage, a restraint and moderation in all your desires. The same thing, as it is suitable to your Christian profession, is also necessary to make you truly independent in yourselves, and to feed the source of liberality and charity to others, or to the publick. The riotous and wasteful liver, whose craving appetites make him constantly needy, is, and must be, subject to many masters, according to the saying of Solomon, *The borrower is servant to the lender.* But the frugal moderate person, who guides his affairs with discretion, is able to assist in publick councils, by a free and unbiaſſed judgment, to supply the
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wants of his poor brethren, and sometimes, by his estate and substance, to give important aid to a sinking country.

Upon the whole, I beseech you to make a wise improvement of the present threatening aspect of public affairs, and to remember, that your duty to God, to your country, to your families, and to yourselves, is the same. True religion is nothing else, but an inward temper and outward conduct, suited to your state and circumstances in providence at any time. And as peace with God, and conformity to him, adds to the sweetness of created comforts while we possess them, so, in times of difficulty and trial, it is in the man of piety and inward principle that we may expect to find the uncorrupted patriot, the useful citizen, and the invincible soldier. God grant, that in America true religion and civil liberty may be inseparable, and that the unjust attempts to destroy the one may, in the issue, tend to the support and establishment of both.

The End.

